

## **Female graduate students (re)define mentoring in educational leadership: Results from a survey**

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### **Abstract:**

Female doctoral students in educational leadership programs receive fewer mentoring opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. This chapter presents descriptive statistical results from a survey examining gender differences in how educational leadership doctoral students define mentoring. The findings suggest the need for a broader investigation on discourses and varied definitions related to mentoring women in educational leadership.

**Keywords:** educational leadership | mentoring | doctoral students | gender | women

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## Chapter 16

# Female Graduate Students (Re)Define Mentoring in Educational Leadership

## *Results from a Survey*

Anjalé D. Welton, Katherine Cumings Mansfield, and Pei-Ling Lee

### OVERVIEW

Female doctoral students in educational leadership programs receive fewer mentoring opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. This chapter presents descriptive statistical results from a survey examining gender differences in how educational leadership doctoral students define mentoring. The findings suggest the need for a broader investigation on discourses and varied definitions related to mentoring women in educational leadership.

### INTRODUCTION

[AQ1] Female doctoral students in educational leadership programs receive fewer mentoring opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. This chapter presents descriptive statistical results from a survey examining gender differences in how educational leadership doctoral students define mentoring. The findings suggest the need for a broader investigation on discourses and varied definitions related to mentoring women in educational leadership.

This chapter addresses the experiences of female doctoral students enrolled in educational leadership preparation programs. Educational leadership preparation programs typically consist of graduate-level programs that train students to become school principals, superintendents, policy analysts, higher education administrators, and future educational leadership professors. Prior studies have shown that, regardless of program emphases, females in higher education experience substantial differences in mentoring and other resources when compared with their male counterparts (Austin, 2002;

[AQ2] Mansfield et al., 2010; Jaschik, 2005; Johnsrud, 1990; Rhode, 2003; Rusch, 2004). While organizations like the University Council for Educational Administration

(UCEA) sponsored mentoring programs for women in the past, these initiatives were not sustained beyond the mid-1980s; therefore it is essential that major global organizations in the field of educational leadership place issues of mentoring women back on the agenda (Faludi, 1991; Young, 2005). Research concerning graduate students' gendered experiences in educational leadership programs is sparse (see Mansfield et al., 2010; Killingsworth et al., 2010). Thus, this research addresses these gaps by sharing descriptive statistical findings from a survey of female graduate students in the field of educational leadership.

### MENTORING FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENTS

Regrettably, the high attrition rate of female doctoral candidates is significantly attributed to the lack of mentors and quality mentoring programs (Dixon-Reeves, 2003; Maher et al., 2004; Schwartz et al., 2003). Mentoring relationships with female faculty are fundamental to graduate school completion for female graduate students (Maher et al., 2004; Moyer et al., 1999; Neumark & Gardecki, 1998). Therefore, mentoring for female graduate students is of particular importance for a number of reasons. Graduate students who experience quality interactions with mentors demonstrate greater research productivity (Boyle, 1998), have access to more professional opportunities and networking, and receive a higher quality of training (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006) than graduate students without a mentor.

### DEFINING EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP

There is institutional variance in the definition of faculty-student mentoring (Campbell, 2007). Examples of

institutional faculty-student mentoring dynamics include a typical faculty-advising system or elaborate matching programs between mentors and mentees (Campbell, 2007). Other institutions determine quality faculty-student connections by evaluating how personal, significant, and lengthy the mentoring relationship is (Campbell, 2007). Intentional mentoring programs best meet the goals of graduate student retention, academic performance, and placement (Campbell, 2007). Thus, the literature suggests institutional context influences how the faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships are defined.

A mentor is someone who the graduate student can emulate. The mentoring relationship initially begins in a one-sided fashion with the professor guiding, modeling, and eventually transferring the skills necessary for the mentee to become part of the next generation of teachers and researchers (Rosser, 2004). Accordingly, doctoral programs help graduate students hone their professional identities as researcher, teacher, and an engaged public scholar (Colbeck, 2008). It is crucial for advisors and committee chairs as mentors to provide doctoral students with critical feedback and encourage them in scholarly endeavors such as writing and navigating professional networks (Rosser, 2004).

### THE EVOLVING NATURE OF MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIPS

As stated earlier, the mentor-mentee relationship begins as one-sided but then progresses to a collaborative and bidirectional relationship where mentor and protégé grow and become empowered through dialogue, feedback, and reflection (Rosser, 2004). This reciprocal relationship connecting teacher and student fosters growth and advancement for both parties (also see Freire, 1990). Likewise, research has shown that feedback can be a powerful tool in the mentor-protégé relationship. A quality mentor builds a scholarly and professional foundation by directing the mentee toward all forms of professional socialization and preparation available so that the mentee can then successfully transition to the professoriate (Sherman & Grogan, 2011). Hence, the development of the mentor-mentee relationship is essential to the overall experience of the doctoral program.

### METHODS

Our research made use of survey methodology. This method of inquiry is a rigorous form of research that draws inferences about a specific population by surveying

a small sample of the population (Czaja & Blair, 2005). The design of the survey was based upon findings of our previous qualitative study (Mansfield et al., 2010). We developed and administered a 30 multi-item measure, [AQ3] web-based survey, consisting of mostly closed-ended questions based on a Likert scale and a few open ended questions, to a subsample of female and male doctoral students enrolled in educational leadership programs from UCEA member institutions in summer 2010. We purposefully sampled (Patton, 2001) doctoral students from UCEA-affiliated institutions with the goal of providing the organization preliminary feedback on gender and mentorship in educational leadership preparation programs. Although the survey explores gender issues in educational leadership doctoral programs, for the purposes of this study we chose to specifically center our descriptive statistical analysis on gender differences in definitions and levels of mentoring.

The following questions guided the construction, interpretation, and presentation of the research:

1. How do female graduate students in educational leadership define mentorship?
2. In what ways are female graduate students mentored in their educational leadership preparation programs?

### FINDINGS

#### Demographics of the Educational Leadership Programs

The enrollment in graduate programs as a whole has experienced significant changes in the distribution of gender since 1988 across higher education institutions in the nation. Particularly in the past two decades, the number of female graduate students increased substantially. By 2008, the postbaccalaureate enrollment comprised 59 percent females and 41 percent males (Aud et al., 2010). Table 16.1 provides demographic information of the graduate students who participated in our study. The information listed in Table 16.1 illustrates the representation of women was more than twice that of men. In all, the study represents 78 participants (52 female and 26 male) who are currently enrolled as doctoral students in educational leadership programs. Additionally, Table 16.2 confirms 89.7 percent of participants were from public universities. All male participants were enrolled at public universities while 85 percent of female participants were enrolled in public universities and 15 percent were enrolled in private universities.

As one can note from Table 16.2 above, among the participants, their academic program emphases varied from a focus on: K-12 leadership studies (42% of

**Table 16.1** Participants' Institution Types

Institution Type	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Public institution	26	26	100%	52	44	85%
Private institution	26	0	0%	52	8	15%

**Table 16.2** Participants' Educational Leadership Preparation Program of Emphasis

Emphasis of Program	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
K-12 leadership studies	26	11	42%	52	21	40%
Educational policy studies	26	7	27%	52	14	27%
Higher Ed admin policy	26	3	11.5%	52	10	19%
Community college leadership	26	0	0	52	1	2%
Superintendency preparation	26	2	8%	52	1	2%
Curriculum and instructional leadership	26	3	11.5%	52	5	10%

male vs. 40% of female); educational policy studies (27% vs. 27%, respectively); higher education administration policy (11.5% vs. 19%, respectively); community college leadership (0% vs. 2%, respectively); superintendency preparation (8% vs. 2%, respectively) and; curriculum and instructional leadership programs (11.5% vs. 10%, respectively).

### Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Doctoral Students

As previously noted, women represent the majority of students who participated in the study; most of who self-identified as white (see Table 16.3). White males were the second largest group in the sample (62%) behind white females (73%). Overall, the male students comprised: 62 percent white; 11 percent Asian American; 11 percent African American; 8 percent Hispanic; 4 percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and 4 percent multi-race. Within the female sample, 73 percent of participants were white, 12 percent were Asian American, 9 percent were African American, 2 percent were Hispanic, and 4 percent were multi-race.

### Parents' Education Information

Below, Table 16.4 displays the educational levels of doctoral students' parents, disaggregated by gender. Approximately two-thirds of parents' education levels fall between some college and a bachelor's, a master's, or a PhD degree. Additional data gathered showed one-third of doctoral students' parents' highest level of education was a high school diploma or less. The percentage of female students' mothers with a master's

or PhD degree is 10 percent higher than the percentage of male students' mothers with a master's or PhD degree. Thirty-one percent of female students' fathers have some college or a bachelor degree compared to 39 percent of male students' fathers. Thirty-seven percent of female and 27 percent of male students' fathers have a master's or PhD degree. Particularly, 15 percent of all doctoral students' fathers received a PhD degree, while only around 5 percent of their mothers finished their PhD.

### Students' Perspectives on Quality Mentorship

We asked students to share their perspectives concerning what constituted a quality mentor relationship between faculty and student. The total percentage for each option added up to 100 percent because participants were allowed to choose as many options as applied to them and their educational leadership program. Findings in Table 16.5 demonstrate that all students strongly agreed that a quality mentor should provide constructive feedback and critiques. Over eighty-percent of all male and female students highly recommended that a quality mentor should encourage development of research ideas, provide professional support, and assist with networking. Above seventy percent of all students indicated that guidance in grant writing and publishing as well as modeling integrity and ethical behaviors are important components of quality mentorship.

Students also reported additional factors for a quality mentor such as commitment to and skill development in resolving conflicts, but students less frequently selected providing emotional support around personal issues.

**Table 16.3** Participants' Background Characteristics—Race

Race	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Asian American	26	3	11%	52	6	12%
Black or African American	26	3	11%	52	5	9%
Hispanic or Latino	26	2	8%	52	1	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	26	1	4%	52	0	0%
White or Caucasian (not Hispanic origin)	26	16	62%	52	38	73%
Multiple races	26	1	4%	52	2	4%

**Table 16.4** The Educational Levels of Doctoral Students' Parents Disaggregated by Gender

Parents' Education Levels	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Mother Education Levels</i>						
Less than high school	26	1	4%	52	2	4%
High school diploma or GED	26	8	31%	52	15	29%
Some college	26	9	35%	52	9	17%
BA/BS	26	4	15%	52	12	23%
Masters	26	3	11%	52	11	21%
PhD/JD/MD	26	1	4%	52	3	6%
<i>Father Education Levels</i>						
Less than high school	26	4	15%	52	5	10%
High school diploma or GED	26	5	19%	52	12	23%
Some college	26	8	31%	52	3	6%
BA/BS	26	2	8%	52	13	25%
Masters	26	3	12%	52	11	21%
PhD/JD/MD	26	4	15%	52	8	15%

Overall, respondents reported that a quality mentor should provide moderate assistance in the development of leadership skills as well as provide career counseling. Students also indicated that they would appreciate some emotional support around work-related issues from their mentors. Concerning the mentor's role in assisting students with presentation skills, 73 percent of male students deemed this important in comparison to 52 percent of female students. Conversely, 58 percent of female students stated a mentor should provide them connections to financial support, while only 38 percent of male students agreed.

### Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee

Table 16.6 displays respondents' perceptions of their current mentorship situation. Since the design of this question allowed multiple responses, the percentage of each option added up to 100 percent. Overall, 89 percent of male students and 67 percent of female students have informal or formal mentors. There was a notable

difference between male and female students when it came to where the faculty mentor was located: 81 percent of male students reported their mentors are at their universities, while 65 percent of female students had mentors at their institutions. There were also considerable differences between the men and women when it came to how often they met with their mentors: 54 percent of male and only 25 percent of female students reported meeting with their mentors monthly. Fifteen percent of female and 13 percent of male students met with their respective mentors weekly.

Participants were asked to report their feelings concerning their mentor-mentee relationship. Using a four-item Likert scale, we coded strongly agree as 3, agree as 2, disagree as 1, and strongly disagree as 0. On average both male ( $\mu = 2.64$ ) and female ( $\mu = 2.32$ ) students strongly agreed their mentors helped them improve their work product (see Table 16.7). Male ( $\mu = 2.61$ ) and female ( $\mu = 2.46$ ) students reported their mentors were supportive, encouraging, and motivating. Moreover, all students on average (male ( $\mu = 2.52$ ) vs. female

**Table 16.5** Students' Perspectives of Quality Mentorship

Quality Mentorship	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Professional support	26	24	92%	52	45	87%
Constructive feedback & critiques	26	26	100%	52	52	100%
Development of research ideas	26	25	96%	52	51	98%
Development of leadership skills	26	16	62%	52	28	54%
Personal care & support	26	14	54%	52	28	54%
Work-related emotional support	26	13	50%	52	30	58%
Connections to financial support	26	10	38%	52	30	58%
Emotional support for personal issues	26	8	31%	52	14	27%
Provides career counseling	26	17	65%	52	31	60%
Networking	26	24	92%	52	43	83%
Grant writing & publishing	26	19	73%	52	39	75%
Develop writing expertise	26	19	73%	52	35	68%
Assists with presentation skills	26	19	73%	52	27	52%
Resolves conflict	26	8	31%	52	15	29%
Fosters integrity & ethical behaviors	26	20	77%	52	37	71%

Note: Participants were allowed to choose as many options as they thought applicable from the list.

**Table 16.6** Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee (I)

Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Currently have informal/formal mentor	26	23	89%	52	35	67%
Mentor at same institution	26	21	81%	52	35	65%
Meet with mentor weekly	26	3	12%	52	8	15%
Meet with mentor monthly	26	14	54%	52	13	25%
Meet with mentor once per semester	26	4	15%	52	12	13%
Meet with mentor once per year	26	1	4%	52	1	2%
Almost never meet with mentor	26	1	4%	52	0	0%

Note: Participants were allowed to choose as many options as they thought applicable from the list.

( $\mu = 2.46$ )) described their mentors as accessible and able to provide constructive and useful critiques of their work. In addition, male ( $\mu = 2.48$ ) and female ( $\mu = 2.57$ ) participants felt that their mentors demonstrated content expertise in their area of need.

- [AQ4] On the other hand, the data also showed that male ( $\mu = 2.13$ ) and female ( $\mu = 1.94$ ) doctoral students on average had the smallest degree of feelings that they
- [AQ5] considered their mentors as friends. They also indicated that they desired more networking opportunities; in other words, they hoped that their mentors could help them make professional contacts. All students thought their mentors were less helpful in providing direction and guidance. Overall, male students felt less comfortable sharing personal information with their mentors. The mean score on perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship level is higher for male students across all items except the statement that their

mentor demonstrated content expertise in the area of need.

### Connections to Mentors

Now we shift our attention to the processes in which students become connected with mentors (see Table 16.8 below). Findings indicate that 38 percent of male students and 56 percent female students are assigned doctoral program advisors. However, formal mentoring programs are very rare across programs. As far as making initial connections, 35 percent of male students and 21 percent of female students took the initiative to approach their mentors based on their interests of their mentors' work. Approximately 12 percent of males (11.5%) and 17 percent of female students reported their mentors approached them to form a research or professional collaboration. Only 4 percent of students were introduced

**Table 16.7 Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee (II)**

Relationship Between Mentor and Mentee	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Mentor was accessible	23	2.52	0.665	35	2.46	0.561
Mentor demonstrated content expertise in area of need	23	2.48	0.79	35	2.57	0.558
Mentor supportive, encouraging, & motivating	23	2.61	0.583	35	2.46	0.657
Mentor helped improve work product	23	2.64	0.581	34	2.32	0.727
Mentor helped me network	22	2.22	0.736	35	1.97	1.243
Mentor helpful providing direction & guidance	23	2.35	0.775	35	2.03	0.857
I consider mentor a friend	23	2.13	0.92	35	1.94	0.802
Mentor provided constructive & useful critiques of work	23	2.57	0.59	35	2.42	0.657

Note: The missing data indicates 3 male (12%) and 17 female (33%) students who did not have a mentor formally or informally working with her or him in the doctoral study.

**Table 16.8 Connections to Mentors**

Connections to Mentors	Gender					
	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	Frequency	Percent	<i>n</i>	Frequency	Percent
Mentor is assigned program advisor	26	10	38%	52	29	56%
Mentor assigned through formal mentoring program	26	3	11.5%	52	1	2%
I approached mentor due to interest in his/her work	26	9	35%	52	11	21%
Mentor approached me to begin research/professional collaboration	26	3	11.5%	52	9	17%
I was introduced to my mentor by individual or organization	26	1	4%	52	2	4%

to their mentors by another individual, professional network, or organization.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Female and male doctoral students shared common definitions of mentorship. All participants agreed that mentorship should include guidance in professionalization, writing, publishing, networking, career support, and leadership development. While the career goals of educational leadership vary across programmatic areas—K-12 or higher education administration, policy analysis, or research and academia—all respondents in this survey agreed further attention is needed in writing and research support in educational leadership programs. In terms of the level and type of mentorship female doctoral students received, a larger percentage of females than males report that they have not been connected to a mentor. Lack of mentoring connections could be related to female perceptions that mentorship deficiencies hinder their degree progress and could conceivably be related to issues of self-doubt.

The descriptive survey analysis of the findings provided a macro-level glimpse of gender differences in mentoring definitions and level of connectedness to a mentor. However, the subsequent research design should convey the complexities of female doctoral students' mentoring processes. Research suggests educational leadership programs can considerably shape students' beliefs and recommends further investigation to understand how the *context* of the educational leadership program shapes one's leadership practices (Bussey, 2008). Therefore, a mixed methods investigation integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches would provide greater insight on linkages between the organizational habits (context) (see Bourdieu, 1977) of the educational leadership program and the participants' survey responses.

Finally, participants in this study presented limited gender differences in how quality mentoring is defined. Nevertheless, there were noticeable gender differences in connections to a mentor, with women reporting limited to no mentoring connections. Findings from our survey align with increasing evidence that gender biases, othering, and oppositions play a large role in why female

graduate students receive substandard or unequal mentoring practices when compared to their male counterparts (Johnsrud, 1992; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Clark & Corcoran, 1986). In conclusion, this survey justifies the need for a global investigation on discourses and varied definitions related to mentoring women in educational leadership, so that organizations that consider mentoring as an institutional pillar, such as UCEA and Women Leading Education, can respond to the call for resuscitating programs and supports that attend to the needs of women in the educational leadership professional pipeline.

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